DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 252 326 RC 014 810

AUTHOR	Schultz, James Willard; Reyhner, Jon Allan, Ed.
TITLE	Famine Winter.
INSTITUTION	Heart Butte School District #1, MT.; Montana Council for Indian Education, Billings.
SPONS AGENCY	Department of Education, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	84
GRANT	G008103248
NOTE	28p.; Story as told by Red Eagle. Edited and reprinted by permission of the Museum of the Rockies, Montana State University. For related documents, see ED 245 860-862.
AVAILABLE FROM	Council for Indian Education, Box 31215, Billings, MT 59107 ($1.00 softbound).
PUB TYPE	Guides - Classroom Use - Materials (For Learner) (051)
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*American Indian Literature; *American Indians; *Cultural Background; Cultural Influences; Elementary Secondary Education; Relevance (Education); *Supplementary Reading Materials
IDENTIFIERS	*Blackfeet (Tribe); Relevance (Cultural); Survival

ABSTRACT

Written for the students at Heart Butte School on the Blackfeet Reservation, the booklet tells a story about Old Sun, a Blackfeet medicine man, and how terribly unkind the country of the far north can be. Old Sun had a dream of a bear with long, soft fur and white as snow. He was advised by his secret helper to get the bear's skin for a sacrifice to the sun. After questioning the Cree for the best route to the north country, Old Sun was determined to start in the spring. Spring came and Old Sun and his family began their trip north. The family had plenty to eat and traveled far. Soon the weather began to turn cold and the land more desolate. Old Sun and his son, Two Bows, looked for the white bears and found none. After traveling 124 days, Old Sun and his family decided to start toward home. Old Sun had a dream that warned him that great misfortune would befall his family. The cold weather made food and shelter scarce. Old Sun, his wife and Two Bows eventually sacrificed their lives to save the life of Old Sun's grandson, Otter. Otter and his mother eventually came to the Crees' camp and were saved. (ERB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED252326

FAMINE WINTER

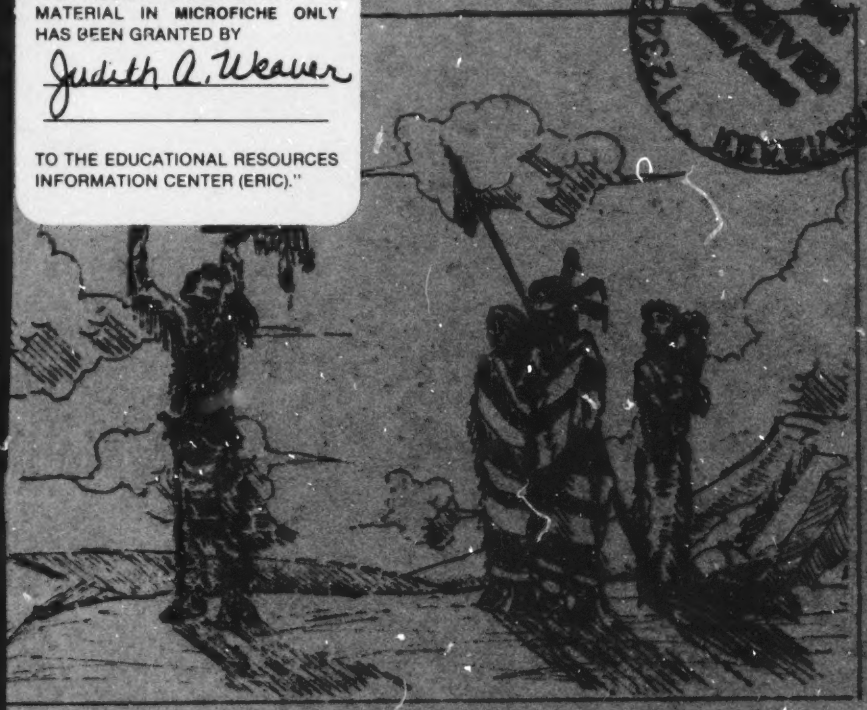
by

James Willard Schultz

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Judith A. Weaver

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."



RC014810

Council for Indian Education

and the

Heart Butte Bilingual Program

1984

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"Famine Winter" is edited and reprinted by permission of the Museum of the Rockies, Montana State University.

This book was partially funded by Grant #G008103248 from the U.S. Department of Education as part of the Heart Butte Bilingual Program. However, opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position of the U.S. Department of Education and no official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education should be inferred.

The staff of the Heart Butte Bilingual Program would like to thank John Murray of the Blackfeet Tribal Council and Tom Thompson, Molly Bull Shoe and Willie Running Crane of the tribal Cultural Review Committee for their help in producing this book.

COUNCIL FOR INDIAN EDUCATION
517 Rimrock Road
Billings, Montana 59102

HEART BUTTE SCHOOL DISTRICT #1
Heart Butte, Montana 59448

Frederik Leitch, Superintendent

Roy Johnson, Chairman

Gene Guardipee
Athena Thompson
Bernice White Quills
Louis Running Wolf

FAMINE WINTER

as told by Red Eagle

to

James Willard Schultz

edited by Jon Allan Reyhner

illustrated by Shawn Running Crane

Council for Indian Education
Billings, Montana
and the
Bilingual Education Program
Heart Butte, Montana
1984

FAMINE WINTER

by James Willard Schultz

At times the Cree people exchanged visits with the North Blackfeet. At one of these friendly gatherings--it was in the long ago, before the white men came--a Cree told of a strange kind of bear that lives in the far north. Their fur was as white as snow, he said, and very long and soft.

A Blackfeet medicine man named Old Sun was much interested in this. He had recently seen just such an animal in a dream. His secret helper had advised him to get the skin of one for a sacrifice to the sun. He therefore questioned the Cree about the best route to the north country, determined to start for it in the spring.

Spring came and Old Sun started off, taking with him his wife, his son, Two Bows, and the latter's wife, Lone Woman. The young couple had a son of three winters, named Otter. Of course they took him with them.

A Cree told of a strange kind of bear that lives in the far north. Their fur was as white as snow, he said, and very long and soft.

All was well with them for a time. Buffalo were plentiful and easily killed, so they had plenty of good meat. Their horses, winter-thin, soon became fat and strong from feeding hugely upon the young, green grasses.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Every day they travelled from early morning until nearly sunset. They were pleased with the rapid progress they were making.

As they went on, and on, the country began to change. They left the great plains and entered a region of much timber, and great swamps. The buffalo disappeared, and in their place were moose and caribou, and black and grizzly bears. Neither deer, nor antelope, nor elk were found after they came to the swamp lands. And now as they went farther and farther into the swamps, travelling became more and more difficult. The horses were continually sinking belly deep in the soft mud, and huge moose flies and mosquitoes drained their blood and made their hides a solid mass of festering sores. But in spite of these difficulties the little party kept up its courage. In the second moon of the quest, they came to a great lake where conditions favored a rest. There the steady west wind kept the flies back in the timber, and along the shore was fine feed for the horses. They remained there many days, feasting upon moose meat. The horses recovered their strength.

Every day they travelled from early morning until nearly sunset. They were pleased with the rapid progress they were making.

Starting again, they followed the rocky shore of the lake for three days, and upon leaving it entered the worst swamp country they had yet encountered. It soon became so bad that the horses could go no farther. Two Bows led them back to the lake and turned them loose in the rich, fly free pasturage. No doubt they would remain there until wanted, he and his father thought.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Afoot now, and carrying nothing more than their weapons, a fire making drill, and a couple of extra robes for bedding, the party made better progress. In the third month out from the Saskatchewan they gradually left the wooded swamps and entered a country of broad, mossy plains where the few trees and brush were very small. Here they found a few bands of animals new to them and easily killed several. Their dogs held them at bay until they could walk right up to them. They seemed to be a relative of the buffalo, but they were much smaller than the big wanderer of the Blackfeet plains. Their dark coat was very thick and long. Their sharp, black horns were set differently on their heads. Their flesh was eatable but strong with the odor like that of the muskrat. The Cree had spoken of these animals. They said that where they ranged, there also ranged the white bears.

Father and son now kept a sharp lookout ahead and carefully noted the tracks in the moss and bare ground. But not a bear did they see of any kind nor even old signs of them. On and on they went. Old Sun kept count of the days and the moons by making notches on an arrow shaft with his stone

Here they found a few bands of animals new to them and easily killed several.

knife. There came no change in the appearance of the country. Ever in front of them stretched the deep mossed, almost treeless plains. Presently, thin ice formed on the still waters in the summer nights. Sitting around the fire one evening, the old man and his son counciled together. Old Sun

10 BEST COPY AVAILABLE

said, "I have just been counting the notches on my arrow shaft. Our trail from the Saskatchewan is one hundred and five days--almost four moons long. This is just about the middle of the summer, yet we see a little ice every morning. I don't understand it."

"There's nothing remarkable about that," Two Bows answered. "Ice sometimes forms in our country in the summertime. If you will just remember, ten summers back there came a snow storm that killed all of the little birds."

"True enough," Old Sun agreed. "I do remember it. This is probably an unusually cold summer here. But what I was thinking is this: The summer is half gone. We will be as long on the back trail as we have been coming out. Dare we go farther or must we here turn toward home?".

Two Bows thought a long time before he answered. Then he said, "Some summers are longer than others. This may prove to be a long one. Anyhow, let's take chances. If possible, you must get a white bear. It is bad luck for you if you fail to accomplish that which your secret helper has told you to do."

Two bows said, "Some summers are longer than others. This may prove to be a long one. Anyhow, let's take chances. If possible you must get a white bear.

"Ai! I do not need to be told that," Old Sun exclaimed, and after some thought he took his son's advice. "We will go on for fifteen more days, and that must be the utmost limit," he said. Early the next morning they were lengthening their trail.

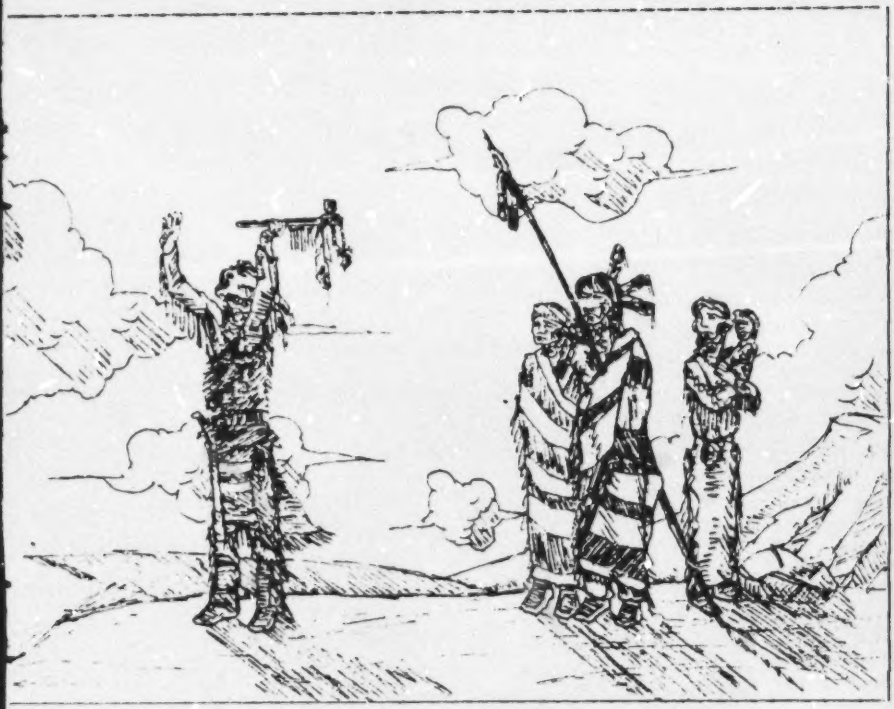
Day after day they breasted the north. They saw no change in the country and found

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

no bears nor signs of them. On the evening of the fifteenth day, they again counciled and decided to go on for four more days. When the end of that time came they made their farthest north camp. There they killed another of those strange little relatives of the buffalo. They had much difficulty in collecting enough fire wood with which to cook some of the meat. The next morning they started on the long trail back with heavy hearts. "I had a bad dream last night," the old man said. "I have been warned that great misfortunes are to befall us."

Although Two Bows and the women pleaded with him, he would not tell them what the dream was.

All was well with the little party for some time. Meat was plentiful and the weather continued to be clear and sunny. Now that they were turned toward home the women were so happy that they joked, laughed and sang. They told solemn Old Sun to cheer up. "Forget your bad dream and laugh with us," they told him. "We will soon have our horses and with them the rest of the way will be quickly travelled."



Frequently now he would get out his medicine pipe to pray and make sacrifice to the gods.

He did his best to do what they asked and at times was really good company at the evening camp fire. But more often he would have never a word to say. Sitting apart from the others he paid no attention to what they did or said. Frequently now he would get out his medicine pipe to pray and make sacrifice to the gods. He begged them to have pity

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

upon the little party and allow them to return safely to Blackfeet land. To his secret helper he would cry, "Hai-yu! Thou wise and swift creature of the great mountain forests! Help me now, oh, help me. Come to me in my dream. Show me the way to save these, my loved ones here."

There came no answer to these prayers. The gods seemed to heed not his sacrifices. After a time his sadness and his fierce anxiety to press on and on from break of day to fall of night had its effect upon the others. Laughter became a stranger to their lips.

While still a long way from the big lake and the horses, the weather became colder and colder. Ice formed on little ponds. Where there was shade from the sun, it never melted. By day and by night great flocks of the web feet tribes passed southward over their heads. They flew low and uttered sad cries that filled their hearts with dread. Well enough they knew that Cold Maker was not far behind the swiftly fleeing birds. "But I can't understand it," said Old Sun one evening after carefully counting the notches on the arrow shaft. "I have made no mistake in marking the time. This is only the second

day of the sixth moon of the summer [September]. The tree leaves in our country are still green. It's too early for the web feet to be heading for Always-summer-land, but they are certainly on their way to it."

"Oh, well, I don't think that these south-flying, sad-calling flocks are cause for alarm," said Old Sun's woman. She was the only always-hopeful one of the party. "Perhaps you all never noticed, but I have many times, that flock after flock of the web feet come south to feed and play in our prairie lakes long before the leaves turn yellow."

"Ai! But not the big-white-coats, woman mine, not they. The red feet, the white jaws, yes. When the big-white-coats go, winter is ever close behind them."

"Perhaps they go now only to the big lake where our horses are," Two Bows suggested. "Let us hope so, anyhow. Let us try to be more cheerful. Father, take courage."--He said that for the sake of his woman, who was crying. In his own heart was a great fear.

The old man did not answer. That very night a windless snow storm set in. At daylight the amount fallen came halfway to their knees. It was very light and dry,

however, and did not much interfere with their progress. They travelled steadily all day. The storm continued at intervals and ceased at dark. Then with a clear sky, the night turned very cold. The birds had not lied. Winter was upon them.

The first snow never melted. Now and then more came until, at last, further progress became impossible without snowshoes. The men had never made, never seen, such walking instruments. They had only heard of them through the Crees. They had but a faint idea of the size and shape of them. However, they made bows of willows and strung them with strips of hide of one of the caribou they had killed. After four days work, they completed a pair for each one of the party. They did not go very far on them the first day. They found them awkward, heavy and very tiring, especially to the muscles of the leg below the knee. They had many falls and tumbled head first into deep snow before they learned to move their feet widely apart.

Some days after, they crossed the southern edge of the moss grown plains and entered the timber. The trees were scattered at first but soon became a forest of fairly large trees. Meat had been scarce for some

They travelled steadily all day.

time but here they expected to find the great number of moose and caribou seen on the northward journey. To their surprise not a track of them was to be seen. They had left the country, gone to their winter range--wherever that might be, south perhaps, or west, to the slopes of the Back-bone-of-the-world. The Crees had told of the immense numbers of rabbits inhabiting the forests of this, their country. When other game could not be found they were sure of an ample

18 BEST COPY AVAILABLE

supply of the long-eared jumpers. Except that every seventh summer they became sick and practically all died off. Old Sun had counted on them for food if worst came to worst. Now there was no more sign of them than there was of the large meat animals. Undoubtedly this was a seventh year. His despair was now complete. "There's no hope for us. Here I give up. Here I die," he told the others one evening. It was with great difficulty that they persuaded him to take the trail next morning.

"No, I am not a coward," he said in answer to his wife's scolding. "Look at my war record. It speaks for itself. Few men in all our tribe have a better one. It is that I know it is useless to go on. My medicine is somehow broken. We shall starve to death."

"Take courage, father, oh, do take courage," Two Bows entreated. "It is not very far from here to our horses. We will kill them. Their meat will last us all winter."

The horses were indeed their one hope now. They struggled toward them, weak and starving. One day Two Bows killed two grouse. On another day he killed a rabbit,

"No, I am not a coward," he said in answer to his wife's scolding. "Look at my war record. It speaks for itself.

---

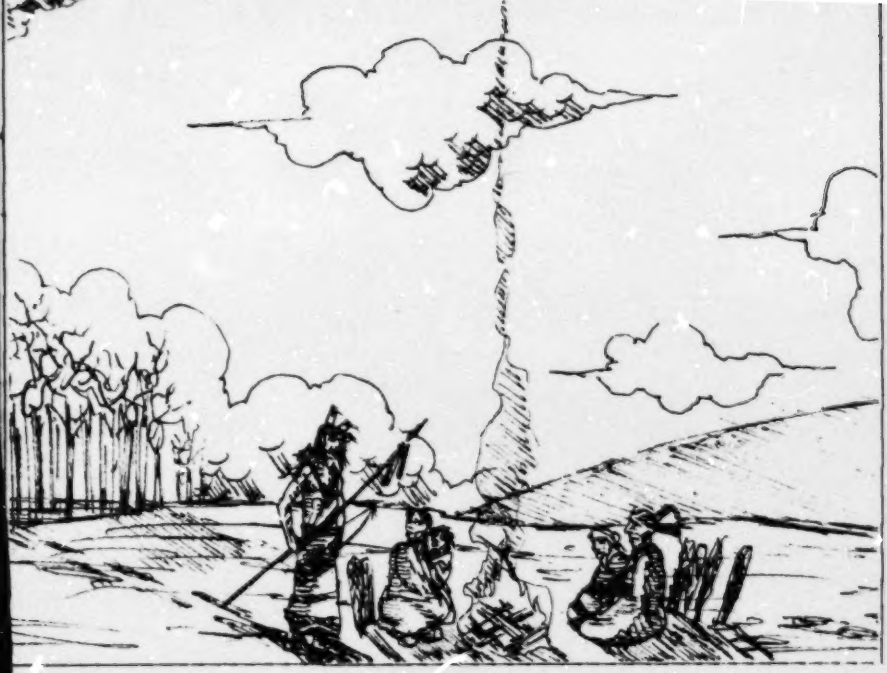
and one evening sent an arrow through a great white owl that was hooting over their heads. The greater part of the meat of these was fed to the child. The others tried to sustain life by chewing caribou rawhide. It could not be done. They were forced to do what they had all along feared must come to pass.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

One by one they killed their four dogs and ate them, begging the gods forgiveness for taking sacred life. The animals were very thin, more skin and bone than meat. But there was sufficient, used with care, to last them to the lake and the horses.

They built the fire one evening on the site of one of their outbound camps. They knew that by noon the next day they would arrive at the lake. For once they ate heartily consuming the last of the dog meat, except enough for the morning meal. Then they made plans for the winter. They would kill all the horses, dry the meat, and with the hides and the caribou skins they had, make a small lodge to live in until spring. Old Sun, however, took no part in the talk. "We shall see what we will see," he said, and told his woman to spread the robes.

"Now! Now for the horses," Two Bows cried when they came to the big lake and its windswept grasslands the next day. But no horses were in sight. Leaving the others to rest, he ran from open park to open park in search for them. It was not long before he returned. He walked slowly now, and watching him, the others held their breath. Bad news was surely coming. "Well, let us hear the



"Well, let us hear the worst," the old man demanded when Two Bows had arrived at the fire and was standing dejectedly before it.

---

worst," the old man demanded when Two Bows had arrived at the fire and was standing dejectedly before it.

"Very well, you shall hear it," the young man cried. "I found the bones of the horses. Wolves have killed all of them."

"Ai! It is just what I expected you would find. I was sure of it," said Old Sun. "Well, here ends my trail. Here I lie down to my last sleep."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"Oh, no father! No!" Two Bows cried.

"I have said. All your talk shall not change my mind," he declared.

"It shall never be said that I deserted my father. I shall remain and die with you."

"Oh, my son, my foolish son," the old man wailed. "Don't you see how it is? I order you to go that I may live. Not in this old body of mine, but in the child there. We caused him to come into the world, and in him we live again. It is our duty to give him every chance for long life and happiness. How much greater then will be his chance if I remain here. You will have one less mouth to feed--".

"Two less, for here I remain with you," his old wife cried.

"Ah! I thought you would say that. I am glad," said Old Sun. "Ai! My son, you heard her. You will have two less to care for. The little game you may find will perhaps support the three of you. There is the chance that it will. Go, then. Start at once and take the chance. You have to go. You have no choice in the matter."

"Two Bows, man mine, father is right. You have no choice. Come let us start. We must at least try to save the child," said Lone Woman. She was crying.

By hard hunting Two Bows managed now and then to kill a grouse, an owl or rarely indeed, a rabbit.

At that, Two Bows himself began to cry, hoarsely, gaspingly, as men always do, truly a heart rasping sound. Presently he said, "Father, Mother, I take your word," and he embraced them as did Lone Woman. When the old couple had bid farewell to the child, they took it and started on. They never once looked back lest what they should see might break their none too strong resolution. As they went, they heard Old Sun, brave to the last, singing the victory song.

Day after day the thin and weary couple trudged over the deep snow. By turn they dragged the child on a caribou skin. By hard hunting the man managed now and then to kill a grouse, an owl or rarely indeed, a rabbit.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

No more than enough to enable them to stagger slowly southward. Of the meat he killed, the hunter took the least portion, ever insisting that he had not the hunger feeling.

Thus they travelled all through two long, cold winter moons and a part of another. Then one day Two Bows killed three grouse. Right there he built a fire, told his woman to cook them and started out after the remainder of the flock. She roasted them nicely and fed the child. Then she ate half the breast of one and waited for her man to return to eat his share. She waited and waited. The short day passed, but he did not come. When the moon rose, she took the child and the remainder of the cooked birds and followed his trail. She soon found him lying by a little fire that he had built. The fire was nearly out, and he was dying. She knelt beside him and took his head in her lap. He opened his eyes then and whispered, "Press on. Press on. Save the boy. The way is not far now." Having said that, he died. For her sake and that of the boy, he had starved himself to death.

She soon found him lying by a little fire that he had built. The fire was nearly out, and he was dying.

Weak, and half crazed with grief, the woman did press on. On the very next day, she came to the edge of the buffalo plains, to a camp of Crees, and was saved. Later she was taken to the camp of her own people.

There my friends, now you know how terribly unkind is the country of the far north. Kii! I have said.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

NOTES

James Willard Schultz lived with the Blackfeet during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. He saw the last of the great Buffalo herds disappear and the forcing of the Blackfeet onto smaller and smaller reservations. He wrote many stories about the Blackfeet. The story called "Famine Winter" is in the Special Collections library of Montana State University. The original version can be found in WHY GONE THOSE TIMES (ed. by Eugene Lee Silliman, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1974). Jon Reyhner edited the story for the use of students at Heart Butte School on the Blackfeet Reservation.

The Blackfeet Reservation is located in north-central Montana on the eastern edge of the Rocky Mountains next to Glacier National Park. To learn more about the Blackfeet, three books are suggested: THE BLACKFEET: RAIDERS OF THE NORTHWESTERN PLAINS by John C. Ewers, University of Oklahoma Press, 1982; BLACKFOOT LODGE TALES by George Bird Grinnell, University of Nebraska Press, 1962 (This is a reprint of the 1892 edition); and THE OLD NORTH TRAIL: LIFE, LEGENDS AND RELIGION OF THE BLACKFEET INDIANS by Walter McClintock, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1968 (This is a reprint of the 1910 edition).

The Heart Butte Bilingual Project has published a number of other stories for children about the Blackfeet including "The Loud Mouthed Gun", "Quest For Courage", "Natosi: Strong Medicine", "Sik-ki-mi", and "Little Blaze and the Buffalo Jump". These

stories span the history of the Blackfeet from the time before they had horses and guns till their first contacts with White-men in the middle of the nineteenth century. They are available from the non-profit Council for Indian Education, Box 31215, Billings, MT 59107.

Heart Butte Bilingual Program Staff

Jon Reyhner, Director

Warren Adams, Asst. Dir./Curriculum Spec.

Molly Bull Shoe, Resource Teacher

Ann Williamson, Secretary

Pat Calf Boss Ribs, Home-School Liaison

Teaching Aides

Anna King
Frances Hardman
Catherine Hall
Pauline Running Crane